

The Philippines: Snap Elections

President Marcos's announcement on US television Sunday that he intends to hold a snap presidential election on 17 January--the fifth anniversary of lifting martial law--accelerates elections scheduled for June 1987. The mechanics for the proposed elections are still unclear--the US Embassy reports that revisions to the election code may permit an election, referendum, or plebiscite. Furthermore, Marcos apparently plans to proceed without first resigning from office as required by the constitution.

In our judgment, Marcos has selected this strategy--and announced it to a US audience--primarily to **outflank** his critics in the US. We believe that he has been angered by mounting criticism of his administration in the US press and disturbed by the recent series of high-level US visitors. Marcos is apparently confident that he can win an election and thereby silence many of his critics.

-- Recent polls indicate that he is the most likely winner.

What do they show?
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-- The opposition is badly fragmented and will be hard pressed to mount a strong campaign on short notice.

-- NAMFREL, the private poll monitoring group, will have little time to organize effectively in rural areas where Marcos's party exercises considerable control.

-- If he waits until 1987, the Communist insurgency will only worsen and may prevent his party from manipulating elections in the countryside.

-- In our judgment, Marcos expects that his election or referendum victory--unless blatantly fraudulent even by Philippine standards--will divide and confuse US policymakers, regain some of his Congressional supporters, and give him a temporary reprieve from pressures to reform political, military, and economic institutions.

Sunday's announcement apparently caught members of the ruling and opposition parties by surprise.

-- The opposition may be faced with the "no-win" prospect of participating in elections controlled by Marcos or boycotting the process--thereby supporting Marcos's contention that the opposition is afraid to test its popular support because it has none.

Salvador Daniel
Corby Aquino
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-- Some of the moderate opposition believe that the election is unconstitutional, but front-runner Salvador "Doy" Laurel says that he welcomes the chance to face Marcos. Cory Aquino is, for the moment, uncommitted.

-- Independent-minded ruling party member Arturo Tolentino told the press that the elections are unconstitutional and Marcos is bluffing. However, Marcos's key political advisor, Deputy Prime Minister Rono, said Sunday that Marcos's announcement was "the real thing".

-- Many important legal questions remain unresolved, however, including whether Marcos will run with a vice president--he prefers not to--and whether the January election will usher in a new six-year term or only serve as a temporary bridge to the June 1987 presidential elections.

Players	Assets	Liabilities	Remarks
Imelda Marcos	Vast financial and political resources accrued through positions as Minister of Human Settlements and Governor of Metropolitan Manila . . . tight control of access to Marcos's powerful allies—Romualdez, Cojuangco, and Ver.	Lost standing in party when she failed to deliver Manila in National Assembly election . . . many senior officers in military think she is incapable of running the government . . . reportedly lacks Marcos's political astuteness.	Recent activities suggest desire to succeed Marcos remains . . . does not recognize her unpopularity . . . could move to seize power if she determines she cannot secure the ruling party's nomination, which she probably expects . . . <i>requires husband's support to succeed.</i>
Juan Ponce Enrile	Has amassed considerable financial and political resources in his years as Defense Minister . . . longstanding relationship with Eduardo Cojuangco who reportedly would back his bid . . . has been mending fences in the ruling party . . . small group of officers in the military loyal to him.	Closely associated with martial law . . . power has eroded as Ver's influence has risen . . . many see him as political "has been" . . . has been viewed as arrogant by many in ruling party.	Has declared himself a candidate . . . attempting to identify with General Ramos's untarnished image . . . would probably seek to build alliances with opposition to gain support for his bid . . . many in both ruling party and opposition believe he carries too much political baggage to win . . . <i>has a reasonably good chance.</i>
Eduardo Cojuangco	Wields tremendous political and financial clout, including well-oiled political machine nationwide . . . one of Marcos's principal cronies . . . business interests include control over the coconut industry and the Philippines' largest food processing company . . . US Embassy estimates he may be a billionaire.	Reputed to be a ruthless businessman . . .	<i>Appears to want to influence the succession without becoming a contender . . . will be a key behind-the-scenes player . . . will back whomever he believes capable of winning and protecting his interests.</i>
Arturo Tolentino	Highly independent KBL member . . . well respected by party members as well as among opposition and foreign observers . . . former Minister of Foreign Affairs.	Advanced age . . . longtime associate of Marcos . . . lacks national political machine.	Wants to oversee the transition from Marcos to new leader and would like to be a candidate . . . <i>could be a compromise candidate for opposition and ruling party members.</i>
Jose Rono	Shrewd politician . . . one of Marcos's closest political advisers . . . effective moderator between opposition and ruling party assemblymen . . . Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government, Secretary General of the ruling party.	Viewed by many as a Marcos sychophant.	<i>Reportedly is being considered as a good vice-presidential candidate . . . his political expertise and leadership skills in the party would make him a valuable ally.</i>
Salvador Laurel	President of UNIDO, largest opposition coalition . . . has attempted to fill void left by Aquino's death . . . former Senator . . . has national recognition.	Epitomizes old style politician . . . not charismatic . . . family associated with Marcos . . . served in the interim National Assembly . . . was once member of ruling party . . . unable to galvanize opposition following Aquino's assassination.	Is clearly a candidate, but would not be a popular choice among opposition . . . at a minimum will figure prominently in opposition selection . . . <i>probably will not succeed.</i>
Corazon Aquino	Wife of slain leader Benigno Aquino . . . has taken highly visible political stand since the assassination . . . widely recognized and is popular at the grassroots level.	Had no political experience before the assassination . . . is first cousin to Eduardo Cojuangco.	<i>Many in opposition believe she could win on popular appeal alone . . . is likely to face resistance from opposition members who do not feel she has paid her dues . . . we believe her support would be essential for any opposition candidate.</i>
Ramon Mitra	Member of opposition group PDP-Laban and National Assemblyman . . . charismatic speaker with national standing . . . could probably depend on financial support of Cojuangco.	Association with Cojuangco has tarnished his credentials in opposition circles . . . longstanding association could damage his chances for securing support for his candidacy.	Has been mentioned by many observers as a possible candidate . . . or as a vice-presidential candidate on a KBL-opposition coalition ticket . . . <i>likely to be an opposition contender.</i>
Jovito Salonga	Recently returned to Philippines after four-year exile in US . . . president of Liberal Party, well respected in opposition ranks . . . severely wounded in attack in 1971 . . . nationally known.	Years in exile have isolated him from opposition mainstream . . . divisions in party may be exacerbated by his return.	Commands substantial influence within the opposition and is often mentioned as a serious opposition contender . . . his candidacy would probably cause dissension within opposition, especially among those who believe that his years of exile should preclude his getting involved . . . <i>faces an uphill battle for the opposition nomination.</i>
Aquilino Pimentel	Leading opposition assemblyman with national recognition . . . established his credentials by becoming active in rallies after the Aquino assassination . . . Chairman of	Still has subversion charges pending against him . . . Supreme Court has barred him from taking seat in National Assembly.	<i>Often mentioned by many observers as key opposition contender . . . strong stand against US bases will hurt his chances with moderate opposition members . . . nationalis-</i>

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